

By the Kansas Historical Society

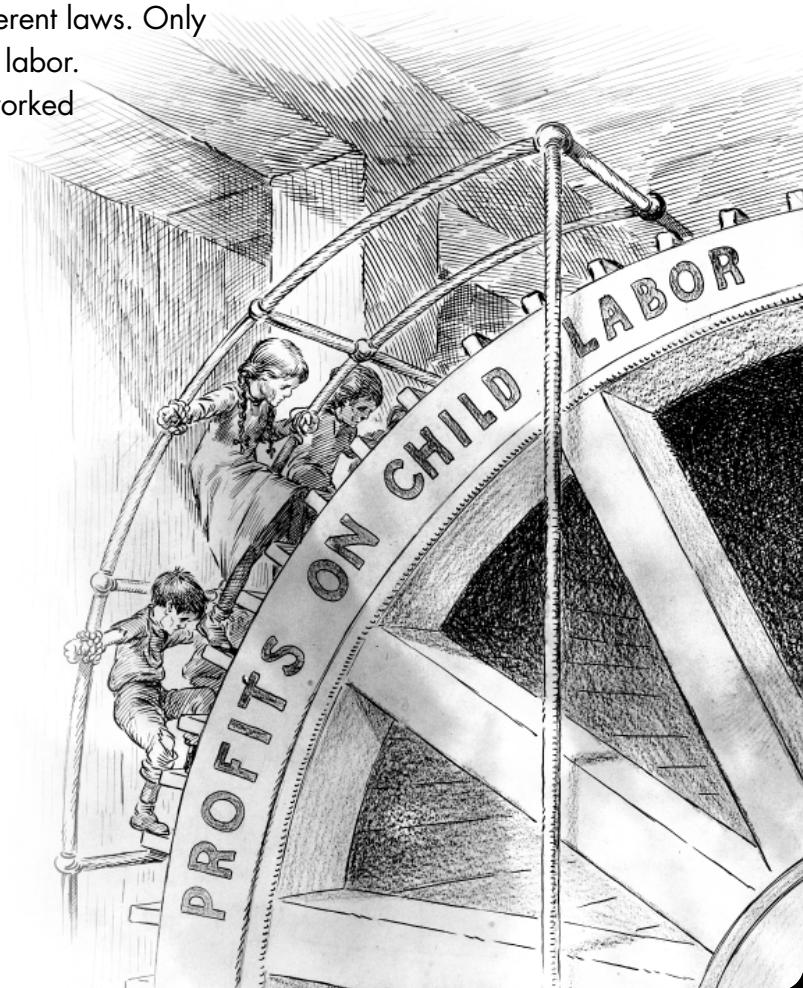
## The Progressive Movement's Impact on Labor Reform

The turn of the 20th century was a time of unrest and reform in the United States. The new Progressive Movement continued making changes the Populists had begun. These changes were said to be "progress." People began to think differently about the role of government in citizens' lives. State laws passed between 1904 and 1912 reflect the changes made by Kansas Progressives. In the process, Kansas led the way to national change.

### What was the problem?

In the early years of the 20th century, the American economy shifted from agriculture based to a factory system of mass production. Often people were forced to work long hours in unsafe conditions. Few laws protected factory workers. Labor laws were not national and each state had different laws. Only a few states had laws that regulated child labor.

Children sold newspapers on the street, worked in factories and mines, or worked in farm fields. Some industries wanted children to work because children were small enough to get into tight places that adults could not reach. Many families needed the extra money a child could earn. However, when those children were working, they were not going to school. They did not get an education, and they had no way to learn new skills that would help them get better jobs.





## What was the solution?

The goals of the Progressive Movement focused on labor reform:

- Ensure safer working conditions in factories and mines.
- Protect workers if they got hurt on the job.
- Ensure that children would go to school and would not be forced to work in factories, mines, and in the fields.

The Progressive Movement led to laws that created safer conditions for Kansas workers in factories and mines. The legislature passed other laws that provided workers compensation benefits for people who were injured on the job. Some states started passing labor laws in the first part of the 20th century. It was not until 1948 that all states had laws to protect workers.

In 1905 a child labor law was passed in Kansas. Revisions were made to the law in 1909 to allow state inspectors to better enforce it. Because of this law, employers could only hire workers who were older than 14 years old. In some hazardous jobs, children had to be 16 years old to work. Employers had to get a certificate from school to document the age of a child worker. State inspectors looked at these certificates to enforce the law.

## How did Kansas lead the way to national change?

The safety of all workers is important, but for children more is at stake than just job safety. Children who had to work could not go to school. Kansas passed its first child labor law in 1905. It took another 12 years until a national child labor law was passed in 1917.